



# Family Engagement Newsletter

## Pretend Play can Enhance your Child's Language Development

By Wendy Overturf

It's so much fun to pretend with your child! But there's a lot more to pretending than just playing around. Children learn so much when they pretend, including some important communication skills. Research shows that pretend play does make a difference in language learning (Han et al, 2010). Pretend play (also known as dramatic play or role play) is critical for developing oral language. Researchers discovered that children engaged in pretend play often use higher forms of language than they would in normal situations. Psychologist Jerome Bruner found that "the most complicated grammatical and pragmatic forms of language appear first in play activity." This is because the pretend situation stimulates kids' language development.

In addition, children learn emergent literacy skills during pretend play, specifically learning about the different situations in which reading and writing may be needed. For instance, during pretend "cooking" play, children learn that in order to make a recipe they must be able to determine what ingredients are in that recipe and reading a basic recipe will help in that regard. Eventually this type of reading gives children authentic motivation to learn reading and writing for age-appropriate purposes. It will be a lot more relevant to write the sign "Open" if they are pretending that they are operating a restaurant rather than if they are asked to write the "Open" without the context of restaurant. The elements of "fun" and "meaning" are important to motivate children.

Parents can help promote this wonderful opportunity for learning in their children's lives both in and outside of schools. [The Power of Pretend Play in Language and Literacy Learning](#) offers some ideas on how parents can support pretend play.

- ◆ Choose a play setting of your child's interest or a setting with which they are familiar, such as the grocery store, restaurant, or veterinarian's office.
- ◆ Provide some background knowledge by reading a book, showing photos, taking a field trip, and/or discussing what it's like to be in these places.
- ◆ Ask your child to help you create and gather appropriate props for the setting.
- ◆ Create writing opportunities by making signs with your child. For example, for a restaurant, create signs that have the restaurant's name, open/closed, hours of operation, a special daily menu, and name of waitress/waiter.
- ◆ Identify words that are specific to the play setting. Consider both nouns and verbs. When playing with your child, use the vocabulary while taking the role of coplayer. For example, if pretending to be in the veterinarian's office, you may say "Let's check your dog's temperature with a thermometer" or "Let's use the scale to check your dog's weight." However, don't force your child to use new words right away. After multiple exposures to new words and new concepts, they will eventually utilize the new learning.

Check out the article [The Land of Make Believe: How and Why to Encourage Pretend Play](#) for some strategies for making the most out of pretending with your child. Not sure which toys to use? The article [Toys that Kick Start the Imagination](#) provides ideas about some simple toys that encourage pretending.

[Does Play Make a Difference?: How play intervention affects the vocabulary learning of at-risk preschoolers](#), American Journal of Play, 3(1), 82-105. Han, M., Moore, N., Vukelich, C., & Buell, M. (2010)

### Statewide Events

#### [Wisconsin's 26th Annual State-Wide Institute on Best Practices in Inclusive Education](#)

Topics, including: Co-Teaching; Universal Design for Learning; Leadership for What Success Looks Like in Action; Assistive & Inclusive Technologies; Equity in Literacy Instruction; Strategies for Developing and Implementing Inclusive Practices; Supporting Students with Mental Health Needs in Inclusive Classrooms; Paraprofessionals as Partners; High Quality Inclusion for Young Children; Teaching & Supporting Social & Emotional Competence & more.

**7/29 preconference** focuses on teaching students with significant supports needs.

**Date:** July 29-31, 2019

**Location:** Westwood Conference Center, Wausau, WI

#### [Learn it Today, Use it Tomorrow! Effective Interventions for Improving Executive Function Skills in Children/Students](#)

A day of training featuring functional, ready-to-use strategies for teaching students how to develop their executive function skills.

**Date:** August 5, 2019

**Location:** Appleton North High School, Appleton, WI

#### [Youth in Partnership with Parents for Empowerment \(YIPPE\)](#)

An opportunity for youth with disabilities (ages 14-21) and their parents to learn about the transition process in a unique way while building real life skills in the areas of employment, education, living and health. YIPPE is a no-cost event and participants must be able to attend all five weekend sessions.

[2019-20 Locations & Dates](#)

## Statewide Events

### [Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin Fall Conference "To Infinity and Beyond: Preparing Adolescents to Launch into the Real World."](#)

Nancy Clements is a speech-language pathologist and Executive Director of Social Thinking Boston®, the East Coast sister clinic to Social Thinking Stevens Creek and Social Thinking Santa Clara.

**Date:** October 3, 2019

**Location:** Florian Gardens Conference Center, Eau Claire, WI

### [Transition Parents in Partnership \(PIP\)](#)

Transition Parents in Partnership (PIP) is an opportunity for families to learn about the transition process for their youth with disabilities ages 14-21 in the areas of employment, education, living and health. PIP consists of five sessions and participants must be able to attend all Saturday sessions. This is a no-cost event.

**Dates:** October 5, 2019, November 9, 2019, January 4, 2020, February 8, 2020, March 14, 2020

**Location:** Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, Fennimore, WI

### [30th Annual Children Come First Conference](#)

The Children Come First Conference is for those caring for, working with, or concerned with the well-being of children and young adults with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Some scholarship funding will be available for parents/primary caregivers who would otherwise be unable to attend. The 2019 conference theme is "Cooperation." Youth (ages 12-26) who have a social, emotional, behavioral, mental health or substance use challenge will be able to attend the 2019 conference as well. Youth are invited to attend the keynote speaker presentations, and then enjoy special youth-only sessions during workshop breakout times.

**Date:** November 11-12, 2019

**Location:** Glacier Canyon Lodge, Wisconsin Dells, WI



## At Home Learning Strategies



Many of you may have viewed the [video](#) that went viral in the past few weeks. The video features a baby having a full on gibberish conversation with his father. In the video, the father and son are sitting on the couch watching television. As they watch, the baby starts pointing at the screen and speaking gibberish. The dad responds to his son as if he's chatting with a close friend. And though we can only understand the father, it looks like the pair is having a real conversation. While the video is funny, it also is a really great example of developmentally sound parenting. There is a very good chance that kid will [grow up to be a fine conversationalist](#).

From a developmental perspective, what we're seeing in the video is a baby who is actively developing a capacity for speech and language. A child's ability to talk doesn't just happen. Children acquire a capacity for language by listening and interacting with parents. Whether the dad in the video knows it or not, he's helping his baby understand that communication is a two-way street. He is using a technique commonly used by speech and language pathologists — the three-second pause. The dad isn't just engaging in a monologue. After he responds to his baby, he waits. That pause allows for his child to respond. This allows the child to practice the cadence of conversation that will ultimately build a strong foundation for future communication.

What makes the interaction even more important is that the dad shows real interest in what his child is saying. He's responding to the inflection, gestures, and tone in a real way. This social interaction helps to build a bond between baby and dad. It shows that the dad is engaged and caring which promotes even more interaction.

Importantly, if the pair had been silent, the child wouldn't have been learning much about language from the TV itself. Studies have shown that children are less likely to learn language skills by watching communication occur on a screen. Real progress occurs when a kid is interacting with a real person.

- Adapted from article [by Patrick Coleman, "Fatherly," June 7, 2019](#).

## READING

not just for school . . .  
but for life

Children who **DO NOT READ** in the summer can lose two to three months of reading skills.

Children who **DO READ** tend to gain a month of reading proficiency.

### [July 2019 Activity Calendar](#)

Explore seasonal reading activities for every day of the month. Click on each entry to discover printable resources.



A family vacation is a perfect opportunity to create a trip scrapbook that will be a lasting souvenir of family adventures. Collect postcards, brochures and menus from restaurants and tourist attractions. Encourage your child to write descriptions of the places you visited and tell stories about your family's escapades.

## Online Resources: Speech & Language

### [Center for Parent Information and Resources](#)

This website provides fact sheets about milestones of typical speech and language development. It also provides information about speech and language impairments and provides links to many other resources related to speech and language development.

### [The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders \(NIDCD\)](#)

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), conducts and supports research in the normal and disordered processes of hearing, balance, taste, smell, voice, speech, and language.

### [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)

This site outlines services for students with speech and language disabilities. There is information on eligibility criteria as well as links to other resources on the web.

### [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association](#)

Find information about activities that encourage speech and language development as well as information related to typical speech and language development.

### [The Stuttering Foundation](#)

Provides free online resources, services and support to those who stutter and their families, as well as support for research into the causes of stuttering.

### [icommunicate](#)

The website has information relating to speech and language difficulties, child development, milestones, autism, apraxia, hearing impairments, stuttering and stammering, and dyslexia and literacy difficulties. It also has links to many more resources related to speech and language.

### [Summer Reading Lists for Reluctant Readers](#)

During the summer, many children won't get the reading practice that they get in school. But books that engage the imagination can provide motivation to keep up skills until school starts again. The website gives some lists of books to captivate reluctant readers, no matter what their age.

### [U.S. Department of Education](#)

This is a very comprehensive site offering information on language development activities for children from infancy to age six. These are activities parents can do with their children that not only promote language development but also to assist in helping children learn to read.

### [Free Online Speech and Language Apps for Kids](#)

This site provides links to free online apps that offer parents a way to refine and practice their child's speech and language skills at home.

### [What's the Difference Between a Speech Impairment and a Language Disorder?](#)

Often the words *speech* and *language* are used interchangeably. However, these words have very different meanings. Check out the link to learn more.



### [6 Tips to Having a Sensory Friendly 4th of July](#)

With parades, BBQs and professional grade fireworks displays, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is, for many of us, an anticipated holiday. Though the traditions that surround this day of celebration are generally fun for the whole family, they can be overwhelming and nearly intolerable for children with Autism or Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). If your child has trouble dealing with sensory stimulation, this [article](#) offers some survival tips to help your whole family enjoy the day.



Whether your child is able to engage in a full day of activities, or just visit a BBQ and spend a quiet evening at home playing board games, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is a great day of celebration with family and friends. The most important thing is to find a holiday tradition that allows your family to enjoy the day together.



[Transition from Birth-to-Three to School \(Spanish\)](#)

Date: July 11, 2019

Time: 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Presenter: Melissa Velez,  
WI DHS—Birth to 3

REGISTER: contact [Nelsinia Ramos](#),  
(414) 374-4645

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[2019 Endless Possibilities Conference: Supporting Students with Learning Disabilities](#)

**8/2/19 Keynote: Impossible to Possible—My Journey from Special Education to Ph.D.**

Shawn Anthony Robinson Ph.D.

Other Topics Include:

- Compassion Resilience Toolkits for Schools, Healthcare, Community and Caregivers
- Reading Drives Achievement—Wisconsin's Approach to Results-Driven Accountability
- Reading Supports for Secondary-Aged Students with Learning Disabilities
- Orton-Gillingham Approach to Reading and Spelling
- Preventing the School to Prison Pipeline
- Using Visual Resumes to Increase Employment Outcomes
- Teaching Strategies for Students w/ Dyslexia or Struggling Readers
- Building the Foundations for Literacy through Music, Movement and Play
- Using WI Social and Emotional Learning Competencies to Support Student IEP Development
- Transition Planning: Preparing for Work or College after High School
- Literacy Resources from WI DPI

**8/1/19 (Free) Pre-conference options:**

- Youth Mental Health First Aid

- Serving on Groups Training

Dates: August 1-2, 2019

Location: UW-Whitewater,  
University Ctr

[Registration Link](#)



## Self-Care Strategies for Families with Children with Disabilities

Check out this [archived webinar](#) from The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE).

**About the webinar:** Self-care for the caregiver of a child with disabilities is a complicated topic that fellow caregivers find frustrating. The reality is simply most of us cannot fathom having the time or the capability to address our own needs ahead of a child with complex needs. This presentation encourages us to redefine what self-care really means for the parent of a child with disabilities. How do we reframe self-care in the context of our challenging lives? How do we discover achievable self-care? And, most importantly, how do we prioritize our own physical and mental health throughout this all-consuming journey? This webinar will explore the obstacles that often sabotage our own self-care and ways we can overcome them. *While material in this webinar is focused on caregivers of children with disabilities, the content is applicable for all of us learning how to better take care of ourselves.* This webinar is also available in Spanish. [El video en español.](#)



## Research to Read

### Language Development during the Adolescent Years: Aspects of Pragmatics, Syntax, and Semantics

Nippold, Marilyn. (2000). Language Development during the Adolescent Years: Aspects of Pragmatics, Syntax, and Semantics. Topics in Language Disorders - *TOP LANG DISORD*. 20. 15-28. 10.1097/00011363-200020020-00004.

#### [Article Link](#)

Aspects of language that develop during the adolescent years are discussed in the domains of pragmatics, syntax, and semantics. Selected topics include complex conversational behaviors that adolescent boys and girls employ with peers versus parents; syntactic attainments associated with persuasive writing, one of the most difficult forms of written expression; and the understanding of proverbs, figurative expressions that place significant processing demands on the listener or reader. Developmental studies that have addressed each topic are reviewed, and implications for instruction are offered for speech-language pathologists who work with adolescents having language difficulties.

This monthly update is provided by the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. *If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, contact: Wendy Overturf at [woverturf@wifacets.org](mailto:woverturf@wifacets.org).*



## Contributions to the Newsletter

**Upcoming newsletter topics: August: Other Health Impairment**

**September: Assistive Technology**

**October: Learning Disabilities**

*To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources, you may use the attached word document. Send submissions to [woverturf@wifacets.org](mailto:woverturf@wifacets.org). If unable to access form, you may send information in an email.*

*Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to sources of family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.*



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